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 Treat Yourself to an Around the Table Chef's Apron

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More information the web at
www.susannye.com

Several years ago I had a job interview that was probably not the worst ever but it was certainly far from the best. It happens to everyone. No matter how hard you try to have a meaningful conversation, you and the other party just can't seem to see eye-to-eye. It could be at work or on a blind date; maybe you are shamelessly pleading for volunteers over the telephone or shouting at your teenager through a slammed door. For whatever reason or reasons, you're getting nowhere fast.

In my case it was an interview with a big, strapping, soccer-playing engineer. I am not an engineer, nor am I big or strapping and I don't play soccer. In other words, I didn't have a lot in common with my interviewer. It shouldn't have mattered since it was a marketing not an engineering job and the ability to kick and/or run with a ball was not in the job description.

The interviewer couldn't have been more obvious in his disdain and disinterest in my very fine credentials. Moreover, he focused most of his time grilling me on a section at the very bottom of my resume. I'd labeled it Other. It didn't really need to be there but I wanted to include the languages which I spoke both fluently and badly. (I used the phrase *working knowledge* to describe my broken French and even more broken German.) Then I listed a few interests, including art, reading, long distance running and skiing. (I did not mention liking piña coladas or getting caught in the rain.) I thought these little tidbits made me look well rounded.

Within minutes my new soccer playing friend zeroed in on Other. My language skills were of no interest. Instead, he targeted the discussion on what he described as my solitary hobbies. I guess he never joined a book club or visited a museum with a friend. He had particularly harsh words for my sporting activities. Since I didn't play a team sport he was convinced I could not be a team player. Trying to recover I mentioned I'd recently taken up doubles tennis. He wasn't interested. Dumbfounded, I pointed out evidence of strong team work in previous jobs. He was not impressed.

It's taken more than a decade but I think I finally have a comeback...well at least for skiing, I'll figure out the rest another day. Here goes!

While teamwork might not be its strong suit, skiing should not be dismissed. It is a great sport because it helps us develop ...

Courage: whether it's your first time on the bunny slope or the toughest double diamond, pointing your skis down what seems to be a perilously steep hill requires guts, nerves of steel and maybe a leap of faith.

Brevity and clarity: regardless of what needs to be communicated, a skier can tell any story in six minutes or less. That's about how long it takes most New Hampshire chairlifts to get from the bottom of the mountain to the top.

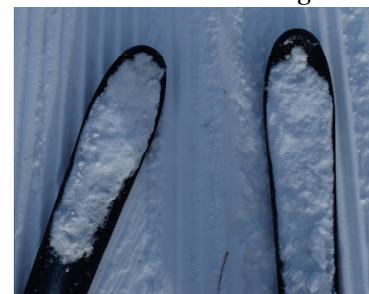
Organization skills: even the youngest skier must learn to juggle hats, helmets, mittens, gloves, boots, skis, poles and season pass. Forget or lose any of these items and you are left sad and alone in the lodge, panhandling for spare change for cocoa while your friends and family play on the slopes.

An uncanny knack for overcoming obstacles: caught in a long, densely packed lift line, an enthusiastic skier will figure out the quickest path over, under, around and through the crowd.

Optimism: if you ski in New England, you face dark days in December, arctic winds and frigid temperatures in January and vacation crowds in February. However, you know in your heart of hearts, that tomorrow (or next weekend) the sun will shine, the powder will be knee deep and spring skiing is just around the corner.

Enjoy the snow, stay warm and bon appétit!

Bon appétit!

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Chicken Niçoise

Bring a little Mediterranean sunshine to your winter table with this yummy chicken dish. Enjoy!

Serves 4-6

- 1 3/4 cup dry white wine
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh rosemary leaves
- 2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 4 boneless chicken breasts (6-8 ounces each) – preferably with the skin on
- Olive oil
- 2 red onions, cut in half lengthwise and then in 1/4-inch wedges
- 1 teaspoon anchovy paste
- Pinch chili pepper flakes
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
- 1/3 cup chopped dried apricots
- 1 cup crushed tomatoes
- 1/2 cup drained Niçoise olives, pitted and cut in half (or Greek olives, pitted and quartered)
- 2 tablespoons capers
- 1 tablespoon butter (optional), cut in small pieces
- 2 to 3 tablespoons chopped parsley

In a heavy re-sealable plastic bag, combine 1 cup wine, the mustard, bay leaf, half the garlic, rosemary and thyme and season with salt and pepper to taste. Add the chicken breasts and marinade for 4 hours or all day.

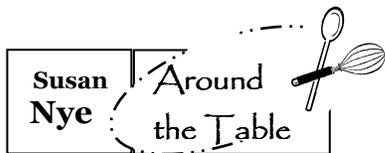
Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Toss the onion, remaining garlic, anchovy paste and pepper flakes with a little olive oil in a large skillet. Sauté over medium-high heat until the onion is tender crisp. Add 1/4 cup wine, 1/2 cup chicken stock, the vinegar, apricots, tomatoes and remaining rosemary and thyme, gently stir to combine. Bring to a simmer, reduce the heat and cook on low for 5-10 minutes. Remove from the heat, add the olives and capers and gently toss to combine. Reserve. (You can do this part ahead of time if you like.)



Meanwhile, remove the chicken from the marinade. Heat a large, oven-proof skillet over medium-high heat; add a little olive oil and cook the chicken skin side down for 3 minutes or until golden brown. Turn and cook an additional 3 minutes. Transfer the skillet to the oven and continue cooking at 375 degrees until the chicken is cooked through, about 10 minutes.

Remove the chicken from the skillet and cover to keep warm. Put 1/2 cup each white wine and chicken stock into the skillet and bring to a boil. Cook until it's reduced by about one-third. Reduce the heat, whisk in the butter and cook, whisking, for a minute or two. Add the onion and olive mixture, gently stir to combine and cook until heated through.



What Skiing Can Teach Us

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Slice the chicken and arrange on a serving platter. Stir any extra juices from the chicken into the onion and olive sauce, spoon over the chicken, sprinkle with parsley and serve.